

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) made the following statement at full committee oversight hearing in the House Committee on Natural Resources. The hearing was titled, “The California Drought: Actions By Federal And State Agencies To Address Impacts On Lands, Fisheries And Water Users.”

Costa is a member of the House Committee on Natural Resources and is a member of the Subcommittee on Water and Power, and is Chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources.

Statement as prepared for delivery.

“First, I want to thank the committee and the chairman for holding this hearing. I also want to thank the witnesses for being here today. This is a critical issue for the Valley and your combined efforts are necessary to determine both short-term and long-term solutions to this drought crisis.

“This current water shortage is having devastating effects for our farmers and farm-workers, and as a result, on everyone living in the Valley. I want to thank all our attendees for taking the time to be here to make sure that others know how vital a reliable water supply is to our economy and our lives. The San Joaquin Valley is the backbone of California’s agricultural economy, with three of the top agriculture producing counties in the nation located there.

“Valley agriculture is a \$20 billion industry that accounts for nearly 40% of the Valley’s employment. As you all know, we are here today because California has faced three consecutive years of drought. Lester Snow, Director of the California Department of Water Resources, who is here today has called this possibly ‘the worst California drought in modern history.’

“A federal court decision last year has already reduced Central Valley Project supplies by approximately 30%, limiting the amount of water that could be pumped from the Delta and then stored in the San Luis Reservoir. While reservoirs hit record lows, federal allocations are set at zero to the San Joaquin Valley, and at 20% for state water deliveries.

“As a result, experts estimate that upwards of 40,000 jobs could be lost, an economic impact that could exceed \$2 billion in the San Joaquin Valley. These losses reverberate throughout the Valley economy. Over 847,000 acres of some of the world’s most productive farmland will be fallowed. More than 300 crops are grown in the Valley, some of which are not grown anywhere else in the country.

“Small communities are crippled by the water shortage, with towns like Mendota at 41% unemployment, Firebaugh at 35%, and Delano (a city of 50,000 people) at 34%. The Mayor of Mendota, Robert Silva, who could not be here today, has submitted a testimony for this hearing. I ask unanimous consent that it be inserted into the record. This drought has a human face that I would like everyone here to recognize.

“Here we have people lining up at the Nancy Daniel of Youth Center in Mendota at the monthly food giveaway. Every month, this food center opens up to feed the hungry. Here volunteers give away 750 boxes of food. In this picture, we see a line of more than 50 people turned away when the food ran out on February 19. In two hours, all 750 boxes of food were given away. Although the Youth Center was set to reopen at 9am the next day, there was no food left to give. Real people are losing their jobs here.

“In July, 2008, we held a field hearing on these issues. Over one month ago, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack issued a Press Release announcing that a Federal Drought Action Team would be created to respond to the drought crisis. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency and ordered immediate action on the drought. While I very much appreciate those initial efforts as a starting point, we still see limited water coming to the San Joaquin Valley today.

“Naming a Drought Task Force is not enough. Plain and simple: we don’t need words, we need water.

“Federal and state collaboration is urgently needed to declare a federal emergency declaration that would provide for water supplies now to alleviate the hardships faced by Valley residents, just as the case with the Red River, and secondly to make funds available for immediate relief; it is my understanding that both USDA and DOI offer a range of assistance programs for rural communities, farmers, and ranchers impacted by the drought. Aid should

be expedited so that it can provide assistance now, when it is needed the most. Third, relax standards that prevent water supplies from going to those who need it. Finally, we need to help California find ways to mitigate its water challenges and meet long-term needs.

“In closing, I want to thank the chairman again for holding this hearing, and I am very interested to hear the testimony of the various witnesses, and thank them again for their time and commitment to this pressing issue.”